

On-disk Yellow Pages? Not yet

There's a battle going on between on-line and on-disk software over Yellow Pages turf. So far, the on-line service is winning.

The disk program, called PC Yellow Pages, provides a listing of 800 numbers and a local directory of businesses in a particular area code. The product — from Digital Publications Inc., 5390 Peachtree Industrial Blvd., Norcross, Ga. 30071, (800) 777-1470 — costs \$99.99 for each available metropolitan area.

However, the program turns pale when compared with an on-line service such as Instant Yellow Pages, available from American Business Lists of Omaha.

PC Yellow Pages' undisputed strongest feature is its built-in automatic dialing program that can be used with a modem. The program also will remember and redial busy numbers and catalog frequently called numbers.

To get this feature with an on-line service, you'd have to download from the main computer into your system, then use a memory-resident program such as Sidekick



Hillel Segal

Plus (published by Borland. International of Scotts Valley, Calif.) to identify the number and dial it.

The program also will print mailing labels and Rolodex-like cards, and you

can use it to create files for use with a mail-merge function on your word processor.

But on PC Yellow Pages' downside:

■ I think there's a flaw in the concept of a disk-based directory whose data base turns over at almost 60 percent every year, by one estimate. Although there are updates that will make the disk more current than your published Yellow Pages, it's still not as current as an on-line system.

■ Following in the footsteps of that flaw, PC Yellow Pages appears to have an identity crisis.

The developers tell us that it's the direct-marketing tool of the future, and that its easy-to-use features are sure to boost sales. But almost in the same breath, they tell us that the directory contains only the most established firms and excludes small businesses such as pizza shops.

This may be an advantage if you're going for large companies, but what if you're in the mozzarella cheese market?

■ PC Yellow Pages is limited geographically, and currently not all areas are available. Check with the publisher for the areas you're interested in.

For \$99.99, you get one area code and the 800 listings. You can buy additional area code listings for \$29 each.

Vertical directories of specific businesses also are for sale. This is useful if your marketing effort is concentrated in a few geographic areas, but few efforts are that restricted.

This disk-based directory is an interesting idea that has its merits, especially the auto-dial feature. It

provides a good business tool for telemarketing organizations to use to target established companies in specific geographic areas.

But for most companies, I suspect, their needs for a computerized Yellow Pages aren't so specific.

The overwhelming disadvantage of this disk-based product is the lack of day-to-day updating that a user can get with an on-line service such as the Instant Yellow Pages.

The bottom line: If computer access to Yellow Pages is something you need in your office, I suggest you go with the tried-and-true on-line Instant Yellow Pages service.

Although it may cost a bit more the on-line directory is more current, useful and readily available for all geographic areas — at least until the disk-based directory is perfected.

Hillel Segal's column includes evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.